The Adolescent Man Box

Priority outcomes and recommendations

The Adolescent Man Box survey was conducted in 2025 with adolescents aged 14-18 years. It is the first of its kind in Australia and is an important contribution to build understanding of the pressures young people face and to generate thinking, discussion and action to improve wellbeing, promote respectful behaviour and reduce violence.

This document details our ambitions for adolescent boys in Australia today as it relates to their attitudes, behaviours and the health and wellbeing of themselves and those around them.

To achieve these ambitions, we have developed recommendations based on the findings of the Adolescent Man Box survey as well drawing on our previous research with men, and nearly 50 years' experience working with men and boys in a range of contexts including schools, community, mental health settings and justice facilities.

Based on an online survey of over 1,400 adolescents of all genders, a reasonably representative sample was achieved for key demographic characteristics including age and gender. Data were also post-weighted to meet the ABS census (2021) to cover shortfalls in national representation. With that said, further work is needed, including through qualitative approaches, to understand and reflect the diverse experiences of young people across Australia.

Our ambitions for change for adolescent boys and our practice expertise has meant we have stretched beyond specific recommendations based on survey findings to suggest systemic change to embed long term planning, investment and evidence building for the best possible outcomes across the entire community.

This document identifies twelve priority outcomes we are seeking to achieve related to specific attitudes, behaviours, knowledge and skills of adolescent boys, as well as broader experiences of well-being. To achieve these outcomes, we then put forward:

- **Five recommendations for immediate policy and practice reform directly informed by our findings** to achieve the priority outcomes – with specific calls to action for government, philanthropists, service providers, schools, parents and technology companies (such as social media and pornography sites).

- **Two recommendations for systemic reform,** informed by our findings and mindful of the scale of the challenges we confront, these system level recommendations draw on our knowledge of the policy context, our practice experience and other related research.

Principles to guide this work: All interventions with adolescents should be age-appropriate, trauma-informed, intersectional, culturally safe, and strengths-based, while respecting young people's voices and balancing support with accountability.

Priority Outcomes: What outcomes are we seeking to achieve among adolescent boys?

1. **Recovery and healing from experiences of violence and abuse**
   A significant number of adolescents reported being victims of aggression (including physical violence, bullying and sexual harassment). There is also substantial overlap between experiencing victimisation and adolescents using aggression themselves. Taken together with other research, including the Australian Child Maltreatment Study, there is a need to better support children and young people to recover and heal from experiences of violence and abuse. This would support efforts to prevent the long-term impacts of intergenerational harm and trauma, including experiences such as poor mental health, substance use, isolation, disordered attachment and dysregulation.

2. **Increased help-seeking behaviours**
   There is a need to encourage an increase in both formal and informal help seeking among adolescent boys, including after experiencing or using violence, for mental health concerns and for other troubling behaviours including harmful pornography use and gambling. While parents play an important role as a source of help, over one-third of adolescent boys surveyed reported they had not sought any support for an emotional or personal issue in the past six months. Some boys, particularly those who strongly endorse the Adolescent Man Box rules, report being unable to show vulnerability with friends. Support must build both the skills and the confidence to seek help alongside increased awareness and availability of support options.

3. **Normalising diverse masculinities**
   Many boys feel strong social pressure to always appear confident, tough, and strong. Teasing is often normalised as "just banter" among adolescent boys, even when it causes harm. Restrictive norms are widely perceived, even by those who don't personally endorse them. There is a need to normalise a broader range of masculinities that are diverse, not unique to men and boys (i.e. are not gendered themselves), gender equitable and inclusive, and healthy (The Men's Project & Flood 2018).

4. **Rejection of violence and violence-supportive attitudes**
   A small but concerning proportion of adolescent boys hold violence-supportive attitudes, and report using aggressive acts towards others. Programs working across a range of settings with adolescent boys should promote non-violent norms and build emotional regulation and conflict-resolution skills among adolescent boys, while also challenging harmful beliefs that link masculine identity with dominance or aggression.

5. **Deepened understanding and respect for gender equality**
   While most adolescent boys say they support gender equality, nearly half believe that boys have it harder than girls. Programs should support adolescent boys to better understand the lived experiences of girls, including rates of sexual and intimate partner violence and the structural barriers to equality. This work should acknowledge the unique challenges boys face, while fostering empathy and shared understanding across genders.

6. **Increased respect and empathy for LGBTQIA+ peers**
   Homophobic and transphobic attitudes remain common among adolescent boys. Programs should promote empathy, inclusion, and respect for sexual and gender diversity, and address the impact of exclusionary and discriminatory behaviours.

7. **Healthier responses to rejection**
   A concerning proportion of adolescent boys report that they usually retaliate when rejected. Programs are needed to support boys to better manage discomfort, shame, and emotional pain without resorting to aggression, control and violent behaviours.

8. **Improved understanding of digital consent and surveillance**

    A concerning proportion of boys (and girls) believe it is normal to constantly track a partner's social media activity and location. Boys who strongly endorse the Adolescent Man Box rules are more likely to agree that tracking or monitoring a partner is normal. Education should address respectful digital behaviours, challenge normalised surveillance, and promote healthy boundaries and safety planning in online relationships.

9. **Rejection of image-based abuse and its social acceptance**

    Too many adolescent boys report behaviours and attitudes that normalise image-based abuse, including in relation to sharing intimate images of partners without their consent or creating sexually explicit deepfake content. There is a need to build increased understandings of the harm and illegality of these abusive behaviours, and to support boys to pause and think before acting on frustration, impulse or peer pressure.

10. **Mitigating the risks and harms of pornography**

    Many boys are exposed to pornography that includes unsafe, aggressive, and non-consensual acts. In addition to efforts to mitigate exposure to harmful pornography, education should help boys understand how pornography can distort their views and experiences of people, sex and relationships, and where to seek effective support for harmful pornography use and its impacts.

11. **Improved bystander confidence and skills**

    Most boys report feeling uncomfortable when witnessing sexist or abusive behaviour, but a much smaller proportion take action. Programs working with adolescent boys must focus on increasing their motivation, confidence, and practical skills to take action safely and effectively when they witness unsafe, sexist or disrespectful behaviours.

12. **Sustaining hope for the future**

    Many adolescents shared that they feel positive about their future. Given the life-giving impacts of hope, in spite of this positive finding, sustaining hope merits ongoing focus. Supported by adults in their lives, we want adolescents of all genders to feel that they are safe, belong, are socially connected and are hopeful for their future.

Recommendations for immediate policy and practice reform

Recommendation 1

Continue to strengthen violence prevention efforts by ensuring that school-based initiatives (including Respectful Relationships Education) and other youth-focused prevention efforts reflect adolescents' lived experiences, and that adults are equipped to work with young people to address the contemporary issues highlighted in this study

This research has highlighted contemporary challenges faced by adolescents that could be better acknowledged and incorporated in current violence prevention work with men and boys. This includes improving adolescents' ability to cope with rejection, preventing harmful pornography use, mitigating the harms of digital surveillance and addressing image-based abuse. There is also a need to both promote help-seeking and strengthen responses to it, to ensure that when young people do ask for help they are met with appropriate, timely and effective supports. Many of these areas of concern are tightly linked with rigid adherence to Adolescent Man Box norms.

Key actions – we call on:

- Governments, peak bodies, and community sector organisations to translate findings from the Adolescent Man Box into practice as part of engaging with adolescents including by:

  - increasing emphasis on building specific skills in areas that to date have received insufficient attention as part of prevention efforts, including supporting adolescent boys to cope with rejection (how to sit safely with the discomfort of being told 'no'), conflict resolution, emotional regulation, strength-based reflection on values, and promoting as well as properly responding to help seeking (including disclosures related to victimisation and use of violence).

  - placing a greater focus on supporting adolescents to safety navigate digital environments including by addressing the harms of image-based abuse, digital surveillance and violent pornography.

  - continuing to engage with young people to inform the development of practical resources such as lesson plans, scenarios, videos, e-learning and self-help modules that tackle sensitive topics in an age-appropriate way

- Governments, drawing on expertise from the community and university sectors, to increase investment in upskilling teachers including by embedding respectful relationships content into tertiary training, and prioritising ongoing professional development for those already in schools.

- Organisations working with men and boys to better integrate explicit efforts to address transphobia and homophobia among adolescent boys including by engaging with people who have relevant expertise.

- Governments and organisations running public violence prevention campaigns to increase their focus on young people, including by drawing on and being informed by the findings of this research, sharing stories from boys and men who resist restrictive masculine norms and related pressures, emphasising that girls overwhelmingly reject restrictive masculine norms and highlighting the reality that masculinities are diverse.

Recommendation 2

Increase the scale of early intervention work with boys to prevent violence by addressing underlying needs, in partnership with communities, while also strengthening the evidence base of what works and what does not

There is a growing and understandable recognition of the need to more closely link violence prevention efforts with men and boys to demonstrable changes in their behaviour. While acknowledging there are facets of prevention work where it will take time to see change, there is also a need to continue to refine and clearly articulate the shorter-term outcomes that programs are seeking to achieve, making a clear case based on available evidence as to why proposed interventions are effective. Starting with early intervention programs working with adolescent boys, there is an opportunity for a more focused effort to drive positive behaviour change. Too often there are missed opportunities to disrupt pathways into violence, leading to harmful behaviours that emerge in early adolescence – continuing and sometimes escalating unabated into adulthood (Boxall, Pooley & Lawler 2021).

While by no means deterministic, many boys who engage in harmful behaviours have also often experienced violence or abuse. Services need to be accessible and respond to the complex needs of these adolescents through early intervention that is tailored, developmentally appropriate, culturally safe and relevant. This stands in stark contrast to an emphasis across states and territories on the punitive levers of the criminal and civil justice system including via juvenile detention and the use of intervention orders for young people. These punitive responses do not address the underlying reasons for the use of harmful behaviours nor the impacts of untreated trauma for adolescents who may be, first and foremost, victim-survivors of violence and abuse.

Key actions – we call on:

- The Federal Government, in partnership with philanthropists, to establish and invest in a fund to support a number of randomised controlled trials focused on working with boys to achieve one or more of the Priority Outcomes outlined above. Design of this fund should be informed by rigorous evaluation of similar programs in other jurisdictions such as Becoming A Man and Coaching Boys into Men. Complemented by close monitoring of implementation and elevating the lived experience of program participants and people in their lives, evaluations should be used to inform the evidence-based scale-up of work with adolescents to support more positive life outcomes including the prevention of violence. Funding should be made available to support community sector organisations to engage in randomised controlled trial evaluations.

- Federal and state / territory governments to focus on specific locations where there is evidence that youth violence is a concern by establishing several place-based pilots. These pilots could use the Adolescent Man Box survey together with engagement with young people and the adults in their lives to inform the development of a multi-year and early intervention program of community-led work, engaging across government departments including with police, tracking progress towards reduction in violence and improvement in other life outcomes for young people.

Recommendation 3:

Better meet the needs of children and young people who have experienced or been impacted by violence or abuse through a substantial investment in targeted, trauma-informed interventions and support services delivered at-scale nationally, focused on healing and recovery

Children and young people who experience violence and abuse need to be engaged as victim-survivors in their own right. This is increasingly being recognised by experts although funding for relevant services to support healing and recovery remains limited. As a result, significant gaps exist across the service system.

Untreated trauma can result in inter-generational violence, poor mental health, substance use and other harmful behaviours. The poor outcomes for some adolescents documented in this report are likely to be underpinned at least in part by the experience of violence or abuse. Further, systems such as child protection, youth justice, family violence and homelessness are often falling short in their efforts to respond to the needs of children and young people who have been victims of violence or abuse, sometimes leading to further harm.

Key actions – we call on:

- The Federal Government to play a leadership role in designing and fully funding a range of services for children and young people who have experienced violence and abuse to address significant existing service gaps. This could involve matched funding from states and territories with payment from the federal government linked to whether Priority Outcomes are demonstrably achieved. Budget mechanisms that use avoided costs could also be used to sustain funding akin to the Early Intervention and Investment Framework in Victoria. These services must be developmentally appropriate and accessible in the settings in which children and young people spend their time.

- Governments and philanthropists to support the development and embedding of a suite of accessible (and where appropriate anonymous) online resources that promote help seeking and respond to adolescents who need support. This could include greater support for adolescents who have been victims of violence or abuse as well as those at risk of harming others. The resources should be promoted in digital environments where adolescents are already spending time and could include pop-up messages, information about available services to support help seeking and messages that direct young people to further resources in response to concerning online behaviours.

- The Federal, State and Territory Governments to foster accountability by:

  - Developing their capacity to monitor the waiting times for children and young people who experience violence or abuse and have been referred to or sought help from services (to keep them safe and support their recovery).

  - Committing to and reporting on progress against targets

Recommendation 4

Equip parents and carers to engage with boys, including by providing practical support on topics such as relationships, dealing with rejection, violence, digital harms, pornography, sexuality and healthy examples of masculinity

Parents and carers are a key source of support and influence on adolescent boys' beliefs and behaviours. The Adolescent Man Box study found that many adolescents look to their parents for guidance on how boys should act. Yet parents are often under-supported in identifying behaviours of concern and navigating conversations about sensitive topics such as coping with rejection, violence, harmful pornography use, image-based abuse, masculinities, sexuality and navigating boundaries in digital spaces.

Key actions – we call on:

- Governments and philanthropists to support the development and promotion of practical resources - such as podcasts, conversation guides, digital kits - that help parents talk with adolescent boys about how to navigate rejection, consent, harmful pornography, image-based abuse, online behaviours, sexuality and masculinities. While there are some existing resources to support conversations about mental health with children and young people, there are far fewer resources that help guide conversations about different forms of violence, diverse masculinities, sexualities and harmful behaviours tailored to key developmental moments (e.g. late primary school, first relationships) reaching parents at scale.

- Governments and organisations running public violence prevention campaigns to increase their focus on the role of parents responding to the issues raised in this research.

- Service and education providers that already engage with parents (for example via parenting programs, family services, health services and through schools) to - with support from governments - increase emphasis on promoting respectful relationships and addressing harmful attitudes and behaviours among adolescents, including the impacts of harmful pornography.

- Employers to enable time for parents to establish connection and bonds with their children including by adopting and promoting policies that provide parents with the opportunity to take leave or work flexibly. This will assist parents to build relationships that create the foundation for engagement on sensitive topics raised as part of this study.

Recommendation 5:

Make digital environments safer and more developmentally appropriate for adolescents including by strengthening regulation related to online safety and building on existing efforts to hold technology companies accountable for harms that take place facilitated by their platforms

Online spaces play a powerful role in shaping attitudes, behaviours and identities during adolescence. Boys are exposed to a wide range of harmful content, including misogynistic influencers, pornography, coercive and controlling behaviours, and gambling, that can be associated with harms to themselves and others.

While the social media minimum age restrictions is an important initiative, the objective of creating a safer, more developmentally appropriate digital environment for adolescents will not be achieved by this initiative alone. Action is required to strengthen Australia's online safety framework to enable it to better deal with image-based abuse, deepfakes, coercive control, and exposure to harmful pornography, and ensure it is responsive to new online harms.

Key actions – we call on:

- The Federal Government to strengthen online safety regulation by;
  - acting on recommendations from key reviews and inquiries related to safety in the digital environment, including moving urgently to introduce a robust and meaningful digital duty of care in line with the Statutory Review of the Online Safety Act, and the Parliamentary Inquiry into online gambling and its impacts on those experiencing gambling harm (the Murphy Inquiry).

  - ensuring the e-Safety Commission's powers are adequate to effectively manage and prevent harms caused by multinational technology companies, including considering whether the maximum penalty is adequate in light of comparable penalties in other jurisdictions, equipping the Commission with appropriate powers to request and publish documents from companies enabling granular transparency, and aligning resourcing of the Commission to the scale of the challenge.

- The Federal Government to require online platforms to do more to implement age-appropriate safeguards (e.g. better regulating features such as infinite scroll and algorithmic recommender systems that promote harmful content) and to integrate age-appropriate prompts that discourage those accessing risky or illegal content (e.g. warning messages before posting harmful content or searching for illegal content).

- Digital technology companies (such as social media platforms and pornography sites) to take demonstrable steps to increase the online safety of digital spaces for adolescents, including by engaging with experts in child development and organisations working with young people to address harms caused or amplified by the digital environment. This includes proactively building in safety-by-design features before services are piloted, and ensuring there are robust age-appropriate requirements in place on the range of platforms to prevent harms to children and young people.

Recommendations for systemic reform

Recommendation 6:

We call on the Federal Government to develop and deliver a dedicated five-year National Action Plan for children and young people who have been victims of violence or abuse, which embeds system accountability to their needs and perspectives, including as part of guiding the investment proposed in recommendation 3 above.

Informed in part by the Australian Child Maltreatment Study, our understanding of the prevalence of child abuse and neglect has evolved substantially in recent years. While some policy documents are beginning to recognise children and young people as victim-survivors in their own right, this is yet to be reflected in practice.

There is increasing evidence at the national, state and territory levels of the significant shortcomings of current system responses for children and young people impacted by violence and abuse. This is reflected in myriad studies drawing on young people's experience of system failures across child protection, family violence, youth justice and homelessness Fitz-Gibbon 2025 a, Fitz-Gibbon 2025 b, Australian Human Rights Commission 2024, Fitz-Gibbon, McGowan & Stewart 2023, Centre for Innovative Justice & Melbourne City Mission 2025). In short, noting variations across different geographies, these studies have similarly evidenced that systems are not yet designed at scale to be accessible and appropriate to meeting the help-seeking and recovery needs of young victim-survivors (Fitz-Gibbon 2025 a, Fitz-Gibbon 2025 b, Australian Human Rights Commission 2024, Fitz-Gibbon, McGowan & Stewart 2023, Centre for Innovative Justice & Melbourne City Mission 2025).

In line with the National Plan to end Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032, the five-year Action Plan that we are proposing should include dedicated actions against each of the pillars: prevention; early intervention; response; recovery and healing. The action plan should embed a children's rights framework including recognition of the best interests' principle that children have a right to participate in all matters that impact them, alongside a right to non-discrimination and freedom from violence.

Accountability to the needs and perspectives of children and young people should be prioritised including through a nationally representative survey of children and young people to inform priorities. Young people themselves should hold roles in the governance arrangements set up to oversee implementation of the Action Plan, with responsibility included for assessing whether strategic priorities are being delivered upon.

Noting the Action Plan would be developed through a significant process with children and young people, drawing on evidence including the Adolescent Man Box study, it could include a commitment to:

- Develop frameworks to effectively prevent and respond to violence and abuse perpetrated against children and young people, including with attention given to the experiences of and risks faced by young people from different community groups and cohorts.
- Build our evolving understanding of the prevalence of child maltreatment, identifying service systems gaps across the prevention, early intervention, response, recovery and healing systems, with the view to working with Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments to address system gaps and unmet needs for young victim-survivors.
- Establish a range of approaches to better promote and respond to help seeking at scale, including by engaging with young people online.
- Monitor the effectiveness of service system responses and provide recommendations as to how the needs of children and young people impacted by violence and abuse could be better met.
- Build workforce capability to respond to disclosures of violence or abuse, promote and respond to other forms of help seeking, better identify, assess and manage risk, and take practical actions related to prevention.
- Elevate the voices of children and young people with lived experience of violence and abuse in a more systematic way with mechanisms in place to act on their perspectives in a timely and systemic way.
- Identify promising practice approaches or systemic solutions with the potential for scale bridging across governments, the community sector, philanthropy and academia.
- Establish mechanisms to track whether the prevalence of violence and abuse experienced by children and young people in Australia decreases over time, with data reported on prevalence rates and embedded in the National Plan outcomes framework.

In addition to the actions above, in line with calls from other advocates, we call on the Federal Government to introduce a Federal Minister for Children to provide cross-portfolio leadership on children's wellbeing, service system uplift and coordination across jurisdictions, and to ensure children's voices are heard in the decisions that impact them. This Ministerial role would drive focused and longer-term reforms across the settings in which children live, learn and play.

Recommendation 7:

We call on the Federal Government to fund a mechanism to improve the creation, sharing and use of high-quality evidence in order to increase the pace of progress and effectiveness of current efforts to reduce men's violence across the continuum of prevention, early intervention, response, healing and recovery

Efforts to end men's violence have increased over recent years but further investment and coordination is needed to address the scale of the problem. Although "engaging men and boys" is identified as a priority in the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022 – 2032, there is limited clarity regarding the implications for prevention, early intervention, response, healing and recovery.

Too often efforts to end men's violence are piecemeal and do not reflect the scale of the problem. The potential of existing efforts with men and boys is currently constrained by a lack of transparency regarding practice approaches, limited investment in developing the evidence base regarding which interventions are most effective and with whom, and limited system-wide understandings as to whether progress is being made to reduce different forms of men's violence.

Program-level evaluations need to move beyond process or implementation evaluation towards a greater focus on outcomes evaluation with more consistent approaches adopted across different funders. Likewise, evaluation of system level interventions (e.g. Respectful Relationships Education) could be strengthened with a tracking of participant (student) level progress in aggregate over time.

As part of designing an appropriate mechanism, consideration could be given to approaches in other jurisdictions such as What Works Centres in the United Kingdom. There are also a range of related existing efforts underway in Australia that could contribute, including the Australian National Research Office for Women's Safety's (ANROWS) Evidence Portal.

The focus of designing this mechanism should include:

- Creating opportunities to foster more purposeful and regular engagement with state and territory governments, community sector organisations and universities including to better integrate research, lived experience and practice wisdom, with particular attention to issues where there are differences of views regarding practice approaches.

- Completing independent evidence reviews focused on specific challenges outlined in the Adolescent Man Box research to inform the procurement, design and delivery of interventions that are most likely to be effective and to reflect the challenges in adolescents' lives.

- Increasing the translation of evidence into practice through implementation guidance and direct engagement with both policy makers and community sector organisations to improve decision making and practice quality as well as cross sector integration (e.g. embedding a greater focus on violence prevention as part of efforts to improve men's health).

- Supporting the coordination and completion of ongoing research and evaluation efforts of specific interventions to deepen our understanding of what is most likely to be effective with adolescents and men to prevent the use of violence. This should include building improved and deeper intersectional understandings of the needs and unique experiences of key demographic groups, and refining interventions to meet the evolving needs and life experiences of adolescents over time, with a focus on better understanding protective factors.

- Ensuring transparent monitoring and reporting on the prevalence of violence to National Cabinet, including collecting and monitoring more extensive data on children and young people. Such data should include tracking against relevant Closing the Gap targets, and provide insights at both local and national levels. This could include embedding adolescent-focused gender and violence indicators, informed by the Adolescent Man Box, in existing national surveys that track cohorts longitudinally to understand how specific attitudes, behaviours and experiences evolve over time (aligned with the Australian Institute of Family Studies' Ten to Men longitudinal study).